

Wildlife Diversity Program News

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Iowa Dept. of Natural Resources

Jeff Vonk, Director

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Funding...Finally!

by Doug Harr

It's been a long time in coming, but more secure funding finally has reached DNR's Wildlife Diversity Program. Late action by the Iowa General Assembly this April raised the fees for Iowa's popular Natural Resource vehicle license plates. The basic fee will continue to fund Iowa's valuable REAP projects, as it always has. But the amount of the *increase* will be reserved only for use in helping our nongame resources.

More specifically, almost all the money is intended to match funds provided by the State Wildlife Grants program. This federal program requires that states must match every dollar provided Iowa by annual appropriations from Congress. Iowa has been fairly successful in finding private match dollars, but budgets everywhere are stretched and future matches were not assured. Income from license plate sales are expected to fill most remaining gaps in meeting the match.

There is a possible down side. Natural Resource license plate sales have been falling in recent years, and a higher license fee could drive sales even lower. DNR currently is planning a new campaign to market sales of the "goldfinch and wild rose" plates. The agency hopes that every citizen conservationist in Iowa will consider renewing their plates, or making a first time purchase, with the knowledge that it will directly contribute to better management of our nongame wildlife resources. Look for further information in future newsletters.

Another Good Nesting Year for Eagles

by Bruce Ehresman

Perhaps some of you are growing weary of hearing that bald eagle numbers continue to grow. But to me, the comeback of this species from total extirpation (in Iowa and many other states) to a now healthy thriving population is a great example of how the Endangered Species Act has been used as an effective tool. This successful recovery is also due, in large part, to an incredible nationwide Environmental Education campaign that has changed the image of eagles and other raptors from villains to respected fellow citizens in the wildlife world. Why else would 10,000 to 20,000 people turn out each year to learn more about eagles and raptors at the many Bald Eagle Appreciation Days and Hawk Watch events held each year in Iowa?

Ten years ago, as I drove across Iowa during the summer months, it was still a rare event to see a bald eagle soaring above the highway or perched in a tree (or on a nest) beside the highway. This year, if I am paying attention, I usually see at least one eagle during a two or three hour drive within Iowa.

Although unable to monitor Iowa's eagle nests to the extent we once did, Iowa's Wildlife Diversity Program continues to record all eagle nest locations and production information on a fair proportion of these nests. This year, 27 new eagle nests have been reported. New counties with confirmed nests include Henry, Adams, and Poweshiek (and probably Marshall). At least, 66 Iowa counties now have confirmed eagle nests, and there almost certainly are over 70 counties with nests. Our conservative estimate of "active" eagle nests in 2004 is 175. Since many of Iowa's prime eagle nest site trees are already taken, eagles are now nesting closer and closer to human habitation (where many gigantic cottonwood trees and potential nest sites occur). Of course with more nests in close proximity to humans come more conflicts, but that is a story for another time.

Recent correspondence from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service indicates that the bald eagle will soon come off the Endangered/Threatened Species List. From a low of 417 nesting bald eagle pairs in 1963, in the lower 48 states, to well over 7,000 bald eagle pairs today, the U.S. bald eagle population has been largely nursed back to health. When the bald eagle does come off Federal and State Endangered Species Lists, we should celebrate this successful restoration! I think it also is important for us to remember the lessons learned from the mistakes that we humans made that jeopardized this species to begin with. We can use the information learned to help benefit many other declining species. A unique opportunity now exists to make positive choices to affect the destiny of a large number of our dwindling fellow habitants.

If we truly care about the future of wildlife diversity on this planet, it is extremely important that we make the right choices now!

Osprey Release Activities

By Pat Schlarbaum

Twenty-three Ospreys from Minnesota and Wisconsin were released this month at five sites around Iowa. The 42-day-old birds were placed at release or “hack” structures in July where they matured for a couple weeks. The young fliers are released in a passive manner to ensure they do not bolt from the site and do not imprint on people. Where Ospreys learn to fly and fish is where surviving adults return to nest. Volunteers are driving energy in this exciting project.

Five birds should be ready to fly at Saylorville Reservoir according to Joe Boyles, naturalist with Polk County Conservation Board and volunteer coordinator, Sue Davies. Five adult Ospreys have been seen at the reservoir. In addition Davies reports an Osprey pair are constructing a nest upon a platform placed for Ospreys at Saylorville Reservoir. Although too late to attempt a nesting this year, this pair provides wonderful anticipation of next nesting season. Joe is at (515)-323-5300.

Four Ospreys will be released by Osprey volunteers at Hartman Reserve Nature Center along the Cedar River at Cedar Falls. Amber Shinn, naturalist for the Center, reports the birds are maturing nicely. Hartman Reserve staff and volunteers have released birds at this site since 1998. Amber can be contacted at (319)-277-2809.

Four birds will be released at Don Williams Lake in Boone Co. by volunteers and staff with Boone Co. Conservation board. Missy King, Boone Co. naturalist, reports many campers at the park are enjoying Osprey activity inside hack structure on a closed circuit monitor set up at the park. Earlier this spring a pair began nest building at an Osprey platform on a pole at Don Williams. Missy is at (515)-795-2809.

Clear Lake volunteers coordinated by Nelson Crabb have been feeding five Ospreys anticipating their release from Iowa Regular Baptist Camp along north shore of Clear Lake. This is the first year of releases at this site. A wild Osprey has been reported at this site also. Contact Nelson at (641)-357-3839 for further information.

And Linn Co. Conservation Board staff and volunteers will attempt to release five birds at their site at Wickiup Hill Nature Center. Dennis Goemaat reports their birds can be viewed on internet at linncounty.org/osprey. Contact Dennis at (319)-892-6485.

Each summer Iowans enjoy seeing Ospreys and are encouraged to look for purple bands on their leg. The purple bands are unique to Iowa and indicate surviving birds that have returned to Iowa to nest.

In addition to nest building activities at Saylorville and Don Williams, there were four other nesting attempts around the state. Unfortunately, severe weather negatively impacted each site. At Red Rock an Osprey pair were unsuccessful for a second year. At Spirit Lake a hatchling did not survive. At Macbride area of Coralville Reservoir, Jodeane Cancilla, Director of Macbride Raptor Project reports a successful nest in 2003 was destroyed when the tree blew over. A second nesting pair were unsuccessful in their first nesting attempt. Cancilla and staff, have provided technical expertise and valuable encouragement while assisting volunteers at Osprey release sites. Macbride Raptor Project of volunteers spearheaded Osprey releases in Iowa in 1997.

The Effects of Roads on Turtles and Snakes

by Bruce Ehresman

According to Iowa DOT statistics, Iowa has 113,960 miles of public roads. There are more public road miles in Iowa than interstate miles in the entire 50 states. That means Iowa is the leading or near-leading state in number of roads per square mile of land surface. Couple this with the fact that 75% of Iowa’s land surface is cropped each year, and creeping or crawling species, like turtles and snakes, are especially vulnerable to being “run over.”

Many of us who work in the conservation field have been concerned that road mortality has been taking a large toll on reptiles. Now recent research is beginning to show the real negative effects that cars and trucks have on these species. A particular study on turtles in upstate New York is finding that car traffic is eliminating females. Researchers have found that in areas of “high road density,” painted turtle populations are 73% male and snapping turtle populations are 95% male. This suggests that more female turtles than males are killed on roads, especially during their spring-summer nesting migrations when females leave wetlands to find upland egg-laying sites. Fewer female turtles can mean fewer baby turtles produced to maintain populations.

Snakes also are susceptible to becoming roadkills, or as herpetologists say DOR (Dead On Road). This is especially true in fall when snakes are enroute to their winter hibernacula and in spring when they are dispersing from their wintering

quarters. One study documented 13,000 road-killed snakes, and several other studies have documented hundreds of snakes killed on roads. Numerous studies have indicated that road mortality is having negative effects on snake population levels.

So what can be done to prevent this unnecessary loss of life? Near wetlands, turtles can be protected from traffic by installing culverts beneath roadways and adding short funnel fences that “herd” the turtles toward the under-road crossing. In the Midwest, there already has been much success using this method for the State Threatened Blanding’s turtle. Turtle Crossing signs also have been installed where turtles cross roads to warn vehicle drivers of the presence of these slow moving creatures. These same methods are being tried with snakes. At an especially busy snake crossing on a Manitoba highway, a series of small tunnels were installed under the highway with barrier fencing erected to guide migrating snakes into the tunnels. The result was a reduction of turtle mortality of almost 75%. Although I am not aware that Iowa has yet installed any turtle or snake crossing underpasses, I suspect that we will be doing so in the future. As we gain knowledge of where significant numbers of these reptiles are dying on our roadways, it appears that we now have access to methods to reduce that mortality.

Watchable Wildlife Conference Planned for Dubuque

By Doug Harr

The new “America’s River” attraction on Dubuque’s waterfront will host a Watchable Wildlife Conference this October 5-7. Iowa DNR will join several other agencies and the conference organizer, Watchable Wildlife Inc., in sponsoring this important conference, expected to attract nearly 400 participants from around the nation.

Watchable Wildlife Conferences bring together natural resource professionals, tourist agencies, and outdoor recreation-related businesses, to jointly boost wildlife conservation and wildlife-based tourism. Wildlife observation is the nation’s fastest growing form of outdoor recreation, with some 66 million participants according to some surveys.

Along with interesting programs, speakers and commercial displays, conferees will have several field trip opportunities and hospitality events to choose from. For more information, log on to www.watchablewildlife.org or email doug.harr@dnr.state.ia.us.

Some Things We Keep

By Mark McInroy

It’s a way of life, although it can drive you crazy.
All the repairing, maintaining, and weeding the daisies.

 You work and slave,
 to conserve and save.

It can be tempting to become wasteful and lazy.

Waste means affluence, there will always be more.
Do we ever really know what is in store?

 With your eyes tightly shut,
 you can become a glutton.

The pain of the regretful lesson can burn you to the core.

Some things we keep.

This is true for marriage and old cars;
Your children’s bad report cards;

 Dogs with bad hips.
 Old records that skip.

Golf clubs, TV’s, and VCR’s.

Think about it, anytime friends and family are stayin’,
That old TV is nice, even if only three channels come in.

 Reception is bad?
 Adjust it a tad.

You can still experience a game that's playin'.

Sure it may not be modern or convenient;
Heck, it may be so old no one has seen it.

If it's all ya' got,
Appreciate it a lot.

Others may mock or scoff, but they don't mean it.

Some things we keep.

Good jokes, memories, and the stories that go with them.
Even the ones that are told nearly every weekend.

Re-telling and reminiscing,
Hear what you're missing.

The benefits are shared- insight, humility, and wisdom.

Consider this true for wildlife and conservation.
Whether it is game, habitat, or restoration.

Establish a precedent,
to have no regrets.

Perhaps handed down for generations.

Some things we keep.

We keep for the value that remains, and the potential of what may still be.

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